

Gardening Spasms

IN any one family there should be only one gardener. Nor should any other member of the family listen to "Gardening Experts" on the air. How can two people have quite the same thoughts and ideas about the positions for new shrubs and trees, and the colours of the beds and borders next summer? Perhaps, for husbands and wives, used to a process of readjustment and tactful living it is possible, but I am not a husband or a wife but a daughter, and for fathers and daughters to be amiable gardeners in the same garden is not possible. At this moment I suffer from terrible repressions and a visit to a psychoanalyst will probably be necessary to have them unfolded and taken out. And I had always heard that gardening was a soothing occupation! Lettuces have been planted round a silver birch—where I wanted larkspur! This is what happens:

Father: "I am making a small sun-bathing lawn near the Olearia hedge!"

Daughter (inspecting area which is two by two): "Couldn't we have it up to the pear tree? (which would be, say, 8 by 2, and really worth while and effective)."

Father: "No, definitely not. I must have somewhere to grow small stuff, and that is just the place!"

I recognise defeat in the shape of a row of half-grown broad beans. What English father could sacrifice a row of these? An American one perhaps. They say Americans will pull down anything and begin again.

A Bearer of Gifts

There was only one way by which I could edge my way into this gardening business—a present to the garden. I ordered trees and shrubs from the nurseryman after an educative session with him about the things that won't grow in our soil. They were usually the things upon which I had most set my heart, or things that he hadn't got himself. However, one morning early, there came three English beeches, six rowan trees, three silver birches, a sumac, a tamarisk, some brooms and some spiraeas; a guelder rose and a dogwood; an Amelanchier and some Cotton-easters, flax and a pussywillow. The trees were no measly little affairs, but trees in miniature, upstanding and brave, and some were six feet. The pussywillow was more; he was a special effort of ten feet. I discreetly remained in bed, and listened to the arrival and reception in the backyard. The English trees were approved; the shrubs, grudgingly, would do. The arbutus was a "pretty little

tree." "But, what's this? Six shillings for flax! Absurd!" And in utter disgust, "three shillings for a pussywillow! Nonsense! They'll grow from any slip." "Yes, sir, but it is ten feet high; and the flax and ngaios do bring the native birds, you know." At this juncture I sent out the money, and although indignant mutterings could not be subdued by cash they were lessened.

Warfare Over The Ribbonwoods

Then there were the ribbonwoods . . . four South Island and two North Island, they came, rising slenderly above their neat sacking feet. They stood forlornly above the earth while warfare waged above them.

Daughter: Don't you think that quick-growing, evergreen things would be a good idea, in a row there behind the silver birches?

Father: Impossible! I am going to have potatoes there.

Daughter: The green trees would look so nice from the windows in the winter. And they grow so quickly.

By Mina Wilkinson

Father: I can't do it. I can't do it. (Spade begins to go in.)

Daughter (eyes on spade): Well, if you hate it so very much, I don't want you to do it for my sake. Hole is dug and first tree is in, then the others.

Father: I suppose you had better get another tree to finish the row.

Rejoicings, slightly uneasy rejoicings.

Seeds—In Packets and Boxes

An economic phase invariably follows such an expenditure as the above. This year, I said, we must grow our flowers from seeds. Why buy plants at a penny to sixpence each when there are simply dozens of such in one sixpenny packet? We seized some aged boxes from the cellar and tacked them together where they fell apart; we visited an adjacent empty section and returned with loamy soil; we attempted to sterilise the soil, and incidentally patterned the kitchen floor with water from boiling kettles; the coal merchant obliged with beach sand, the seeds were sown; we lifted the boxes, and—the bottoms fell out! After all that I listened to the gardening talk from 4YA and heard things about spent hops and oyster grit and all the correct man-



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ners for seed boxes. I switched off hurriedly. Empirical methods were ever more interesting, and amusing anyway.

Gardening Makes You Covetous

Gardening changes your nature badly. I now break the non-envy commandment frequently. Formerly I had a sturdy, upright independence. Now, I just cadge in the most brazen manner. It has been very successful but I notice a tendency among my friends to clutch what they've got left.

So far the garden has not crept in to my prayers as it did into those of Karel Capek. He prayed for a rain of liquid manure. I foresee that soon I shall be propitiating the weather gods for gentle rains every night. Certainly watering is a nice soothing occupation, and the sight and sound of water soaking and sucking into dry thirsty places most gratifying. But still so many accidents are apt to happen and the gardener become wetter than the garden. One leans in a day dream over the tap whilst water gushes into the can. A slight miscalculated movement and a spout of water cannonades against the side of the can and ascends as a geyser that ruins a marcel wave, washes the face, and pours down the neck.

The Nicest Part of All

Weedings are worse than waterings. After two hours on my bended knees one small round bed looks immaculate, but I feel, as I massage my strained and creaking joints, that this gardening spasm will not outlast the season. A concentration on weeds has a peculiar effect. I cannot see a thriving weed just within a fence on the street without a subsequent impulse to pull it up. The weed is only saved by the more strongly imbedded habit that one does not poke into strange gardens. However, I thrash off the heads of dandelions emerging from under hedges, etc., thinking, "Ha, that means a few less dandelions for someone next year."

The nicest time in the garden is the time when one does nothing but enjoy it. That time begins when the lilacs are covered with the tiny points of new leaves and the laburnums show silver green beginnings on dark dead-brown twigs. From then on are stirrings and happenings. Voltaire's last word is that we must cultivate our gardens. Rather would I enjoy them—doing nothing in sunshine, with the bees busy; and what matter a weed here and there?